

FITNESS

Heart Disease and Women: Be Physically Active

Coronary heart disease is a woman's concern. One in 10 American women ages 45 to 64 have some form of heart disease and this increases to one in four women over age 65. Another 1.6 million women have had a stroke. Both heart disease and stroke are known as cardiovascular diseases, which are serious disorders of the heart and blood vessel systems.

Regular physical activity can help you reduce your risk of coronary heart disease. Being active helps women take off extra pounds, helps to control blood pressure, lessens a diabetic's need for insulin and boosts the level of "good" HDL-cholesterol. Some studies also show that being inactive increases the risk of heart disease.

Even low to moderate activity can help lower the risk of heart disease. Examples of such activity are pleasure walking, stair climbing, gardening and yard work. Moderate to heavy activity includes dancing, home exercise and house cleaning. To get heart benefits from these activities, do one or more of them every day.

More vigorous exercise improves the fitness of the heart, which can lower heart disease risk even more. These kinds of activities are aerobic and include jogging, swimming, and jumping rope. Walking, bicycling and dancing can also strengthen your heart if you do them briskly for at least 30 minutes, three or four times a week.

Most people do not need to see a doctor before they start a gradual, sensible program of physical activity such as walking. But, consult your doctor before you start or increase physical activity if you:

- Have heart trouble or have had a heart attack
- Are taking medicine for high blood pressure or a heart condition
- Are over 50 years old and are not used to physical activity
- Have a family history of developing heart disease at a young age
- Have never exercised



STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS
South Carolina Budget and Control Board
Employee Insurance Program
December 2003

